

## [Western Work Gangs]

W13906

Belief & Customs - Folkstuff

Accession no.

Date received 10/10/40

Consignment no. 1

Shipped from Wash. Office

Label

Amount 12p.

WPA L. C. PROJECT Writers' UNIT

Form [md] 3 Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Western work gangs

Place of origin Portland, Oreg. Date 1/10/39

Project worker William C. Haight

Project editor

Remarks (over) [cc?] Occupational Lore

Form A

## Library of Congress

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writer's Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date January 10, 1939.

Address 1225 S. W. Alder St., Portland, Oregon.

Subject Western Work Gangs.

Name and address of informant Joe Stangler, 4868 N. E. Union Ave., Portland, Oregon.

Date and time of interview January 8, 1939.

Place of interview At his home.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant None.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Joseph Stangler's home is a well built, single story house of three rooms and a shed. The outside of the house is painted gray. The inside looks like the paint from the outside had seeped in and covered the boards and walls of the house.

The house is in considerable and presumably permanent disarray. Mr. Stangler is a widower and does much of his creative work in his home. Cement and sand cover the floors, practically hiding what once was blue linoleum.

## Library of Congress

His furniture is adequate but well scarred. For some reason he has three beds and an old-fashioned davenport made into a bed. He lives alone, which makes the fact of multiple beds astonishing.

2

A radio, a cement lighthouse, and a huge loving cup are the most notable accoutrements of the room. The walls are covered with pictures he has painted. The caption under one reads "Miniature Landscape, by Jos. Stangler."

A can wrapped in the label of a well-known brand of coffee, catches with unerring accuracy his tobacco expectorations.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date January 10, 1939.

Address 1225 S. W. Alder St., Portland, Oregon.

Subject Western Work Gangs.

Name and address of informant Joseph Stangler, 4868 N. E. Union Avenue,  
Portland, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts: 1. Ancestry

## Library of Congress

2. Place and date of birth

3. Family

4. Places lived in, with dates

5. Education, with dates

6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates

7. Special skills and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant

10. Other points gained in interview

1. Ancestry, German.

2. Place and date of birth. Portage, Wisconsin, May 6, 1876.

3. Family: His family emigrated from Germany and settled in Wisconsin. He knows very little about his family. This is due to the fact that his father passed away when he was four months old and his mother passed away when he was eleven years old.

4. Places lived in, with dates. Portage, Wisconsin; Minnesota; Bremerton, Washington, and Portland, Oregon. The dates "I'll be damned if I know.", he said.

5. His education has been scanty. He guesses he finished the fourth reader. He "picked up" arithmetic from a friend's correspondence course. He "allows" he is ashamed for his lack of education, but he can read and write "fine". "I allus, been purty good at both."

2

## Library of Congress

Mr. Stangler is a remarkably literate man, with a homely mind. I would imagine his native intelligence would class him with a higher than average I. Q.

6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates. Before 1900: He was successively and progressively farm hand, sheep herder, cattle herder, thrasher, and a period noted for its lack of duration, a logger. After 1900: A bum, mucker, tamper, foreman, finisher (excellent), champion horse-shoe pitcher, carpenter, and an artist. The lack of more conclusive dates is his disinterest in the exact dates. The above classification was close enough he "allowed."

7. Special skills: Finisher, champion horse-shoe pitcher, cement artist, clog dancer. His interests are: painting, singing, collecting rocks; and boxing and baseball.

8. No religion. Community activities have been confined to amusing people by dancing, boxing, and baseball. Horse-shoe pitching for a few years held his high interest, too.

9. Mr. Stangler is six feet tall with an amazing arm spread of six feet ten inches. His frame is slender but well built. He has blue eyes, with sandy colored hair that is slightly streaked with gray. His features are noted for their lack of any sign of age. He has a long prominent nose that disqualifies him from the handsome list. While conversing he readily smiles and often accentuates his remarks by a humorous shrug or a wave of his long "pitcher arms." His fingers are long and slender. I believe he usually wears blue denim overalls. All pictures that he showed me were taken of him with his overalls on.

10. When I introduced myself Mr. Stangler was moving a cement lighthouse, covered with brightly colored rocks, across the lawn in front of his home. As he set down the wheelbarrow, his long arm made a graceful sweep from his elbow to his wrist, across a tobacco stained mouth. For a moment his steady blue eyes looked into mine and he said, "I ain't gonna do nothin' that costs me no money."

## Library of Congress

Assured that what I wanted from him would cost him only his time, he “allowed he'd be mighty happy to tell me his experiences. I got some dingers, too. Young feller, you sure are puttin' yourself in a spot to ask me to talk about myself. I reckon mebbe you're used to it, though.”

Mr. Stangler suggested that we go into his house, “where, if you wanna write anythin' down you can do'er, easier than a standin' up out here.”

When we were “settled down” Mr. Stangler wanted to know where to start. I told the informant we would start at the earliest recollection he had of living. His blue eyes danced with merriment as he said, “God, you sure must be able to take it.” Mr. Stangler impresses you with his honesty and independence of thought and action. He believes that art is purely imagination, and sees no reason to copy anyone. As he says, “I make a deer, then I see a picture of a deer I should have looked at before.”

Form C

Text of interview (Unedited)

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date January 10, 1939.

Address 1225 S.W. Alder Street, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Western Work Gangs.

Name and address of informant Joe Stangler, 4868 N.E. Union Ave.,

## Library of Congress

Portland, Oregon.

Text:

I was born May 6, 1876 in Portage, Wisconsin. Nothin' much happened to me until I was eight years old. Then I started out in the world on my own.

I went to work for a farmer, helping him do the chores. I worked the first year for two dollars a month, board and room. My second year for four dollars a month, board and room. When I left him at eleven I was making eight dollars a month, board and room.

My mother died in January of the year I was eleven. The farmer had paid me off for my year's work and after he had taken my clothes out of my wages I had \$48 left. This I gave to my mother to pay for the doctor bills shortly before she died.

At her death I went to work for a Scotsman as a cattle herder. God, how that guy used to work me. I learnt to box from him, which stood me in good stead later on in life. I weighed about 115 pounds, and he weighed about 215. We would box about twice a day. We never hurt each other because, as you know, a good boxer don't get hit!

2

Here, I started my first courtin' too. There was a dance hall about eight miles from where I lived and I would walk over there every Saturday night to dance.

God, I allus was a fool for dances. We sure did hoe down in them square dances. That's where I learnt to clog so good. No girl would have nothin' to do with you unless you could ho'er down and clog.

I was one of the best cloggers around there. I reckon this was because I weren't Irish. All of them Irish feller's would dance one or two dances, then go out and fight. I allus danced. We would dance some round dances too.

## Library of Congress

(I asked the informant what a round dance was).

“Well, you young ones don't know much about it, I guess, but round dances are waltzes, two steps, and such.

After dancing all night I would walk the eight miles back to the ranch. Usually gettin' home just about time to change my clothes and go to work.

This here , feller I was a-working for would allus have to call me twice on the mornin's after a dance. First time he would call me from down stairs, second time he would come up the stairs a-yellin' his head off and callin':

'First four right and left, sides four right and left, hi ho for Katy, Ireland's Queen'. That was his way of teasin' me about a young coleen I was smitten on around those parts.

My coming west was because I fell in love and told the girl I'd marry her soon as I had \$500. I told her I'd come back after her, soon as I got it.

Well, when I started west I first went to North Dakota, and worked for an uncle of mine at thrashin'. I earned \$120 while I was there. When I left I told him to keep \$100 for me and I would take \$20. I guess I still had that girl in my mind.

3

You know the first time I see them Blackfoot mountains. I was a talkin' to a feller, and he sez, “How far you think they are from here?”

“Why,” I sez, “about two throws of a rock away.” He just laughed. Now, I know why. I tell you I was on the train and we rode all day, most of the night and we had not come to those mountains yet. I gave up and went to sleep. Funny, ain't it?



## Library of Congress

Workin' my way weat west I picked potatoes, thrashed, logged for half a day. I worked on that famous Dalrymple Ranch in the Dakotas. At Sant Point, Idaho, I seen my first horse race. It was just like a story you read.

I was standin' in front of a place when I heard a feller boastin' about his horse. Another feller said he'd bet him \$35.00 that a sloppy looking buckskin that was in harness in front of a wagon on the street, could beat his horse.

I didn't know nothin' about horse racin', but I figgered that buckskin was a little too wide and sloppy to be much on the run. Well, I'm tellin' you they unhitched that old buckskin, and she run so far ahead that the other horse most nearly died eatin' his dust. It sure was a race like you read about.

I hitched another freight, picked up a couple of fellers, and started west again. You know ridin' them rods when your goin' down a hill you could almost read a newspaper by the light the wheels make as they turn over. Funny, ain't it?

I got another job "leadin' the mule by the whiskers." This meant encouraging a mule to pull a load of rock out of a mine to the dump.

Well, finally I landed and started workin' on Jim Hill's first tunnel out here. The Cascade tunnel.

The first thing I did there was sign up for work. We allus called this "signin' the death warrant." You see, it was dangerous work. If a man died on the 4 job they would just "throw him over the bank like a chicken, but if a horse died you really cried." Yep, life was cheap.

We allus said when we were agoin' into the tunnel, "who'll get in the rough-box next?"

## Library of Congress

You know, fellers would got hunches. One electrician there said to me one mornin' "You know, Joe, I'm headin' today for the rough-box." I'll be gol-darned if he didn't got a jolt of juice and grace the rough-box.

I had two hunches. Once, I told the walking boss I wouldn't go into the tunnel because I could see death hangin' all around me. I sez, "I can see a walkin' sign of death, and I ain't gonna go in." So the boss, he lets me take the day off. Nothin' happened but you know, a guy with good sense wouldn't work in that tunnel. In them days men were independent and they wouldn't take nothin' if they didn't want to.

My other hunch was when I was helpin' the superintendent on switchin'. You see, the cook-house and bunks were on the siding, and the siding switch had to be watched so it wouldn't throw any train onto it. Well, by golly the superintendent got to watchin' me and a kind of spell came over me." I knowed if I stayed my time would be called. So I quit. A few days later the superintendent left the switch open and a train cracked into the cook-house. Sure, I was lucky.

All the work in the tunnel was shovel work. I worked on the shovel for a while. Finally, one day the boss sez to me, "You know, you're an artist with the shovel." "Yeah," sez me, "but I ain't gonna do this no longer." Independent like, that was me all the time.

The boss said, "Well, I allow it ain't such good work, but I need a foreman and you can have the job." I sure was surprised because I thought you had to have an interest in the railroad to be a foreman. On that job I had to fight my way to respect.

5

Underground we would work on the high car. (The high car is a platform built on top of an ordinary train car). One feller would always kick my saw and hammer off and I would have to go off the high car and get clear down on the floor of the tunnel, to find them.

## Library of Congress

I stood that as long as I could, and then I called the guy. He and I started fightin'. But the walkin' boss stopped us because it was against the law to fight underground. That feller later was a good friend.

Another guy was always ribbin' me. Callin' me "rube." Of course, I was just a country boy, but nobody likes to be kidded like that. One night downtown he was a-lookin' in a glass, and as I walked by I stuck my head kinda over his shoulder and he says, "Rube, what you doin-?"

I sez to him, "Whose paid for throwin' his voice around here?" Well, one thing led to another and we had a good fight. We were good friends later, though I saw him fight another guy, and if I had knowed how good a fighter he was I sure would a run the other way when he wanted to fight me.

One time when I was workin' on the high car near the head, I slipped and fell off. I was one of the very few men that ever got up and walked away from such an accident.

Another time there a fellow was working on the arches near the segment. A big rock looked kinda loose, so he used a pick on it to see how tight she held. Well, the rock came out and covered him with a good many ton of rock. That feller was lucky: two planks fell across him in such a manner that the rock didn't crush him.

In the evenings we fellows - there were three of us - would provide some amusement for the fellers. I guess I was the "craziest yap ever born", workin' all day I'd clog half the nite. Turn handsprings, and everything else.

6

One feller would sing and the other guy would play the fiddle.

## Library of Congress

One of the songs we used to play, sing, and clog to was "Chippy, Get Your Hair Cut." I can't remember the words he said, but I can clog her out for you. One feller there said that some time I musta been a bum actor. I was always a showin' off.

In 1925 I settled in Bremerton, Washington, and I went in for baseball and horse shoe pitching.

In 1925 I won the Yakima State Fair horse shoe pitchin' contest, and in 1929 the Seattle [Post-Intelligencer?] gave me a loving cup for winning the state championship.

About the only thing to it is not let them "get confidence on you, or you go quick. Get 'em down and keep 'em down."

Now, I am doin' this cement work. It is kinda like being an artist.

Well, I sure enjoyed talkin' to you. I could tell you some more I reckon."

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker William C. Haight Date January 11, 1939

Address 1225 S. W. Alder Street, Portland, Oregon.

Subject Western Work Gangs.

## Library of Congress

Name and address of informant Joe Stangler, 4868 N. E. Union Avenue.

Portland, Oregon.

Comment:

The informant records his personal experiences by the means of maps, self-drawn. These maps are masterpieces of detail. Every trivial incident is recorded. He showed me the map and the partially written story of that one experience. I quote directly:

"Moments You don't forget.

"A fairly cold morning after a terrible Storm What a nise time to go to the Beach as the Storm sure Would Wash up a lot of pretty agats so I put my pail on my Shoulder hanging from a Stop on my way I met two young men who told me the tide had been higher then they had ever seen but as the tide was going out I felt their wasent nothing to fear."

Mr. Stangler's paintings are properly classified as atrocious, and are the first feeble steps of an amateur. However, they do show an unerring accuracy of reporting.

The most amazing fact about this man is his mental alertness. This was an extremely pleasant contact.